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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001548

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: TSVANGIRAI BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON MEETINGS WITH BISHOPS

REF: A. HARARE 1532

[B](#). HARARE 1491

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary:

[1](#). (C) The Ambassador met with MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai on July 29 to discuss the mediation effort by the

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Manicaland Bishops. Tsvangirai reported that when the Bishops' discussion with President Mugabe turned to the possibility of a unity government, Bishop Mutume said they would oppose any deal in which ZANU-PF swallowed MDC. Tsvangirai asked the Ambassador for USG help to ensure South

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African accountability to better guarantee the negotiations make progress, and also to put pressure on ZANU-PF to be sincere. A key indicator of whether Mugabe takes this initiative seriously will be the ZANU-PF position document, if it is submitted, and if it is reasonable. End Summary.

Tsvangirai on Bishops' Meeting with Mugabe

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[2](#). (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on July 29, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai confirmed much of what was reported (Ref A) on the meeting between President Mugabe and the Manicaland Bishops on July 25. He added that the meeting lasted about two hours. Tsvangirai said that initially Vice President Joseph Msika poo pooed the MDC, calling them puppets of Bush and Blair. The Bishops argued that the country could not afford to proceed on its present course, and that they were actually helping the GOZ. The Bishops asked Mugabe what it would take for him to meet Tsvangirai. Mugabe suggested what terms were necessary (Ref A). The Bishops responded that the court challenge was immaterial to the impasse between the two parties. When the discussion turned to the possibility of a unity government, Roman Catholic Bishop Patrick Mutume mentioned that they would oppose any deal in which ZANU-PF swallowed MDC, noting he had been involved in the interparty talks in 1987 when ZANU-PF swallowed ZAPU.

Way Forward

[3](#). (C) Tsvangirai said there were no sticking points in the MDC discussion with the Bishops on July 28. The Bishops said they would remain in the process until the end. They said a next step would be to explain to the South African Government that they were taking this role. The idea was raised during the MDC-Bishops' meeting that the discussion with ZANU-PF could start on constitutional issues, as a way of avoiding the legitimacy issue. The two sides agreed to submit documents to the Bishops outlining their positions. The Bishops said they would compare the two and come up with an outline for negotiations.

[4](#). (C) Contrary to speculation in the local press, Tsvangirai confirmed to the Ambassador that the MDC plans to pursue its challenge of the March 2002 in court (currently scheduled for November 3). However, pursuing that case could become irrelevant depending on the amount of progress on talks with ZANU-PF.

South Africa as Guarantor

[5](#). (C) Tsvangirai also said that South African High Commissioner Jeremiah Ndou had phoned him to pass along President Mbeki's thanks for Tsvangirai going to the opening of Parliament on July 22. Tsvangirai told the Ambassador that the Bishops do not want to exclude South Africa from the mediation process, and that they could play an important role

as a guarantor. Tsvangirai said the Bishops would send a team to South Africa soon to brief the SAG directly. Tsvangirai said that MDC was speaking with civil society

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colleagues, such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to firm up alliances. None of MDC's civil society allies opposed exploring prospects for dialogue.

US Backing Needed

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16. (C) Tsvangirai asked the Ambassador if the USG could help to ensure South African accountability to better guarantee the negotiations make progress, and also to put pressure on ZANU-PF to be sincere. Tsvangirai mentioned that incidents of violence were still being perpetrated on MDC candidates (Ref B) and if ZANU-PF was sincere about reaching common ground, these should stop. Tsvangirai said that the MDC was raising the need to end political violence with Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa rather than making such cessation a pre-condition for talks. Similarly, the MDC was petitioning the courts to re-open the nomination process in those urban councils where MDC was excluded (Ref B). MDC would avoid setting any pre-conditions for dialogue in order to keep the pressure on ZANU-PF to agree to unconditional dialogue.

Comment:

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17. (C) The next important step is the position documents from each side. We have no doubt the MDC will follow through with theirs; however it is unclear whether and how Mugabe's team will follow through on their side. This will be a key indicator of whether Mugabe might actually take this effort seriously. End Comment.

SULLIVAN